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THE CONDITION OF THE SOUTH.

BY WALTER G. OAKMAN.

THE steady advance in prosperity and development in the Southern States, bringing strongly forward the natural resources upon which that advance is based, suggests the inquiry why such advantages have not brought about earlier and greater results, and why that section of the country has failed to attract its share of the added population which has built great cities in the West and has moved the center of population nearly to the Mississippi River.

With a climate genial and healthful over nearly all its area, a fruitful and fertile soil, possessing practically a monopoly in the production of one of the great staples of commerce, with immense and most valuable forests and almost exhaustless mineral wealth, why have immigration and foreign capital been attracted to the South for the development of these resources in a far smaller measure than to much less bountifully endowed portions of our country?

The tremendous waste and sacrifice of the Civil War undoubtedly made it difficult to set once more in motion the wheels of active effort, and to reorganize the productive energies of a region where so much had been destroyed. But a generation has passed since that period, and within a very few years only has the South begun to show her capacity for the creation of values.

In the recent campaign the political attitude of the South made manifest one of the causes which have stood in the way of her advancement, and emphasized very clearly what is, perhaps, the most positive influence that has acted to retard the progress and development of a portion of our country so rich in natural endowment.

The attitude of the South then indicated that no argument, no appeal to reason, would have weight against her traditional

political prejudices or her loyalty to the mere name of Democracy. With that name to conjure with, the politicians can be assured of Southern support for any policy or any platform, no matter how vicious or how destructive! Sweeping as it is, that statement cannot be regarded as unfair when it is remembered that the South, without a break in her column and without any serious effort to secure the result, voted for the Democratic platform, whereas, throughout the entire remainder of the country, where argument was had and policies were considered, only the four States of Colorado, Idaho, Montana and Nevada, casting thirteen Electoral votes in all, were carried by that party.

The one hundred and forty-two Electoral votes of the Southern States were cast against policies which were admittedly in the interest of the Southern people, and with which they are really in sympathy. The silver issue, involving national discredit and general disaster to all business activities, had ceased to command any intelligent following. Beyond the effort of the Democratic leaders to arouse the passions and jealousy of the vicious and least intelligent members of the community, the apparent issues were Expansion and so-called Militarism. With both these policies the Southern people should naturally be in sympathy.

The Democratic party had approved the expansion of the country by the acquisition of Florida, of Louisiana and of California, when Southern men were leaders of the party and molded the future of the American people. The material interests of the South would be peculiarly benefited by a wider market for their cotton and increasing manufactures; while their sympathies for the native Filipinos could hardly have been actively controlling, when so much opportunity exists unimproved for bettering the condition of the inferior race at home by promoting education in handicrafts and useful knowledge and a higher moral standard. Nor, upon the declaration of the war with Spain, did any section of the country respond more eagerly to the call for troops than the Southern States. Among the officers of the army, Southern generals and others of lesser rank were conspicuous for ability and achievement. In fact, the Southerners are a military people, and can hardly be expected to sympathize with fears that any proposed increase of the army could endanger the liberties of the nation—certainly so small an increase in a nation of seventy-five million people.

Under these circumstances, the conclusion seems inevitable that the vote of the South in the last Presidential election was based solely upon the traditions and prejudices engendered by the Civil War, waged nearly forty years ago, and that that vote was insincere, as it did not express the convictions of the voters in supporting the measures which they believed would bring the greatest benefit to the country and to their own section of the country. That this accusation is not unjust is indicated by the admission of leading Southern men that many more votes in the South would have been cast for the Republican ticket but for the conviction that Republican success was assured without their help.

It is, perhaps, as well that so great an object lesson should have been given in the recent campaign. Mr. Bryan and the Kansas City platform were made possible only by the foregone support of the South; and so long as political party support is based upon prejudice and not upon conviction or reason, the control of the political parties will remain in the hands of the most aggressive and unscrupulous of their leaders, instead of the broader minded and more patriotic.

The welfare and future of the nation demands the existence of two political parties to serve as wholesome checks and restraints upon each other; that purpose is not attained when the chief constituency of one of the parties is blinded by prejudice and tainted with insincerity.

It is asserted that the peculiar problems of the South, in its relations with the African race, compel its continued adherence to the Democratic party; that any break in its ranks would result in local injury. Perhaps, in the past, in the years following the enfranchisement of the negro, and of his control by so-called carpet-baggers, such a contention may have been justified. Surely, however, local conditions are now sufficiently in hand to permit of a sincere vote upon national questions of the first importance.

If, however, local conditions are so controlling that in all our national life there is no crisis sufficiently urgent to demand recognition, sufficiently acute to cause the withdrawal of even one from the steadfast column of Southern States, then measures of self-protection for the remainder of the nation are made necessary; and, whatever curtailment of the power of the South in the

Electoral College, or in Congress, may be legally possible, should be undertaken. The nation should not be subjected to the risk of sacrifice, by reason of the selfish unwillingness of any section to separately consider their local and their national policies.

The essential factor in all relations of life wherein various interests meet or combine, for mutual advancement in well-being and prosperity, is confidence in the sincerity of all concerned. Individuals may succeed through favorable circumstance or exceptional ability, even though lacking that element of character; but communities cannot afford to hold other than high standards if they would attract the best influences and command that confidence which is necessary for growth and extension of enterprise. Neither can they afford to remain content under reproach for failure to set up such standards, or they will inevitably lose the best elements of their own people, attracted elsewhere by conditions more in consonance with higher views.

Political insincerity as indicated by the action of the Southern States is so evident, and so compels attention, that it must cast suspicion upon the good faith of the Southern people; and it is earnestly to be hoped that they will soon recognize that their greatest welfare demands that they should follow convictions in the future, instead of surrendering those convictions and their own best interests to a blind adherence to the prejudice of a political creed.

WALTER G. OAKMAN.